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Source: *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, Nuova Serie, Vol. 1 (2006), pp. 29-48
Published by: Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25802984
Accessed: 17-05-2016 22:10 UTC

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KHALID SINDAWI

NOAH AND NOAH'S ARK AS THE PRIMORDIAL MODEL OF SHĪᶜISM IN SHĪᶜITE LITERATURE*

1. *Introduction*

In the present study my aim is to illuminate two major ideas in the broad field of intellectual interplay between Shīᶜism[1] and other religions. The one is the notion, made already in early Twelver Shīᶜism, that all prophets and their deeds are but primordial models for the Shīᶜa itself. The second is that the person and actions of Noah specifically, like those of other prophets, are taken to testify to the antiquity of Shīᶜism and the Shīᶜite creed.[2] The following pages constitute an attempt at elaborating these ideas.

2. *Noah's Ark as a model of Shīᶜism*

An obvious question to ask at this point is: what were the features of the story of Noah and his Ark which made it such a suitable model of their creed for Shīᶜites? The answer lies in two vital elements that invoke in Shīᶜites an image of their self-identity. One of these elements in the story of Noah and the Flood is the traditional perception of the story as telling the fate of the believers, who escape God's wrath, in contrast to that of the infidels, who are subject to divine punishment. The second element is the salvation of Noah through Divine revelation and intervention, which for Shīᶜites has been a source of inspiration for their own post-deluvian reality, for they see themselves as being "in the same boat" so to speak as Noah's family. Shīᶜites thus feel as certain of being saved because of their belief in their saintly Imāms, whom they consider as their own lifeboats or "arks" in the afterworld, as was the tiny minority of believers who followed Noah into the Ark.

In the present study we shall follow the evolution of the story of Noah and the Ark in Shīᶜite traditions from the beginning of its construction until it landed on Mt. Jūdī, and describe how the story provided Shīᶜism with a venerable pedigree going back

* I would like to express my gratitude to prof. Joseph Sadan who read the manuscript and made valuable comments and suggestions. I would also like to mention that some of the references used in this paper are cited from Noor Cd-Roms.

1 "Shīᶜa" and "Shīᶜite" refer throughout this article to Imāmī (Twelver) Shīᶜism.

2 For more on arguments for the antiquity of Shīᶜism see Kohlberg 1980, pp. 41-66.

QSA n.s. 1 (2006), pp. 29-48

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to time immemorial and gave demonstrated the superiority of the Shīʿites over their enemies and oppressors. Shīʿites have gone back thousands of years in search of such proof, long before they themselves appeared on the stage of history, in fact back to the time before creation itself.[3] According to this view, ʿAlī is just one link in a chain of prophets and Imāms which began with Adam.

According to the Qurʾān Noah's ark (*safina* or *fulk* in Arabic)[4] was a vessel which Noah built on God's command. In it he put his human and beastly companions to save them from the Flood.[5] However, in Twelver Shīʿism[6] the story evolved and developed new dimensions and details that made it consistent with the Shīʿite creed, as we shall see below.

3. *When and where Noah's Ark was constructed*

Shīʿite traditions tell us that Noah lived in a village on the bank of the Euphrates[7] just west of Kūfa.[8] Noah according to these traditions was a carpenter[9] whom God made a prophet. His people scorned and despised him, whereupon he invoked God against them: "Noah said: My Lord! Leave not one of the disbelievers in the land. If Thou shouldst leave them, they will mislead Thy slaves and will beget none save lewd ingrates".[10] Then God commanded him to hurry and construct a large ark. Noah brought wood from afar and constructed the entire Ark with his own hands, in the middle of the mosque of Kūfa.[11]

Tradition has it that the construction of the Ark lasted for two cycles, or eighty years.[12] However, the common people among the Shīʿites hold that it took him five-hundred years[13] to complete his project or, according to one tradition, one-hundred

[3] Thus Shīʿite tradition relates, for example, that humans were commanded to swear allegiance to the Imāms before creation, when they were still nothing more than seeds surrounding God's Throne. For details see al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 258; al-Ṣaffār 1983, p. 72, no. 1; p. 89, no. 1.

[4] The two Arabic words are synonyms, both meaning vessel or boat. See Ibn Manẓūr 1990, vol. 10, p. 479. Noah's Ark is mentioned twenty-three times in the Qurʾān; see ʿAbd al-Bāqī 1986, p. 526, root FLK.

[5] For further details on the story of Noah see Canova 2001, pp. 1-20.

[6] On Twelver (Imāmi) Shīʿism see Nasr 1991, pp. 277-279.

[7] For more on the Euphrates see Hartmann 1991, p. 946.

[8] For more on Kūfa see Djait 1986, vol. 5, p. 345.

[9] al-Rāwandī 1988, p. 84.

[10] Qur. 6:26-27; Pickthall 2000, p. 567.

[11] al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, p. 332; vol. 97, pp. 395, 403; al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 3, pp. 399, 404; al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 8, p. 281; al-Ṭūsī 1945, vol. 3, p. 251.

[12] al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 8, p. 280. Cf. this with what al-Kisāʾī says: "The construction of the ark occupied Noah for a month", al-Kisāʾī 1922-1923, p. 92.

[13] al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 8, p. 281.

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years.[14] Noah's Ark is deemed to have been the first floating vessel in human history.[15] According to these tradition the mosque of Kūfa[16] was the site of the Ark's construction.[17] These traditions do not of course claim that the mosque existed at the time, but merely that the Ark was constructed precisely where the mosque would be constructed. What this claim actually means is that Noah was aware of the sanctity which the place where he constructed his Ark would possess for the followers of ʿAlī in the far future.

4. *The beginning of the Ark's journey*

There is some disagreement among Shīʿite sources as to where the Ark's journey began.[18] While most sources agree that the mosque of Kūfa was the point of departure, some traditions claim that the Ark began its journey at the al-Aqṣā

[14] al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 147, *ḥadīth* no. 6. Cf. Canova 2001, p. 4.

[15] al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, p. 33; al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 3, p. 393; al-Suyūṭī 1988, p. 59.

[16] Shīʿite sources claim that the mosque at Kūfa known even in antiquity, having been the site of many important occurrences and possessing numerous merits. Thus, for example, it is claimed that the angels bowed before God there before Adam did, that it was the first mosque on earth, and that Adam had designed it. See Kohlberg 1980, p. 57. Other legends relate that it is one of the gardens of Paradise, where one-thousand-and-seventy prophets prayed, that Moses' staff, the Tree of Yaqṭīn, and the Seal of Solomon are kept in it, and that it serves as a meeting place for the prophets. See, for example, al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 146, *ḥadīth* no. 21; al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 3, pp. 252, 490-494, nos. 1-9. It is further said that when Muḥammad was on his famous nightly journey he passed by the site of the mosque of Kūfa on his steed al-Burāq and asked the angel Gabriel for permission to kneel and pray there. His request was granted and he came down and prayed. See al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, cit.; Ibn Bābawayh 1992, vol. 1, p. 231. Still another tradition maintains that Adam designed the mosque but then the design was changed again and again, first because of the Flood, then by the Persian king Khosrau, by Nuʿmān, and by Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān. See, for example, Ibn Bābawayh 1992, vol. 1, p. 230. Shīʿite sources also list a number of virtues of the site, among them that saying an obligatory prayer there is equivalent to performing the *ḥajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca, that a supererogatory prayer there is the equivalent of an *ʿumra* or minor *ḥajj*, that its grace extends out to a distance of twelve miles, and that in its center there are a spring of oil, a spring of milk, a spring of drinking water, and a spring of water for ritual purification. For details see al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 97, pp. 400-405, 425, 430-453; al-Barqī 1951, vol. 1, p. 56; Ibn Bābawayh 1985, p. 30. Finally, this is the site where the twelfth Imām, the *Mahdī*, who disappeared in Sāmarrāʾ in the year 874 CE, will eventually make his reappearance. See, for example, al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 242, *ḥadīth* no. 51; Schedina 1981; Ter Haar 1993, vol. 8, p. 443.

[17] See Kohlberg 1980, pp. 57-58.

[18] al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 147, *ḥadīth* nos. 23-24; Ibn Qūlawayh 1977, p. 32; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 97, p. 403; al-Ṭūsī 1945, vol. 3, p. 251, *ḥadīth* no. 9; al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 5, pp. 261-262, *ḥadīth* no. 6495.

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mosque.[19] Still other sources relate that the point of departure was the Kaʿba in Mecca, where Noah went on pilgrimage. These sources tell that the Ark circled the Kaʿba seven times, then moved back-and-forth between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa seven times, and finally settled on Mt. Jūdī[20] which, so it claimed, is located in Najaf.

According to tradition the Ark departed on the first day of the month of Rajab.[21] Noah fasted on that day and commanded all who were with him to fast as well.[22] In Shīʿism Rajab has become something of a holy month, which saw many important events take place. In fact, as the story here demonstrates, Shīʿites believe that the month's sanctity goes back to prehistoric times.

5. *How Noah and his Ark are associated with Shīʿism*

Shīʿites have found a number of connections between the story of Noah and Noah's Ark and their own history and creed. It was their intention to seek legitimacy through such venerable antecedents, as we pointed out at the beginning of article. Below we present some of the arguments they used for this purpose.

5.1 *Noah's Ark stops above Karbalāʾ*

In Shīʿite tradition a number of links exist between itself and the story of Noah. One of these is the claim that the Ark passed over Karbalāʾ,[23] where al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (d. 680 CE)[24] was killed. When the Ark was just over the spot the earth grabbed it and Noah feared it would sink. He said: "My God, when the world was flooded I was not stricken by such fear as when we passed over this plot of land.

[19] al-Hilālī 1994, p. 559; al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 3, p. 491.

[20] Fore more on Mt. Jūdī see Streck 1991, pp. 573-574.

[21] For more on the month of Rajab see Kister 1970, pp. 191-223; Id. 1995, vol. 8, pp. 373-374; al-Ḥiskānī 1990.

[22] See Ibn Bābawayh 1992, vol. 2, p. 91, no. 1820; al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 7, p. 226; vol. 10, p. 471; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, p. 304; Ibn Ṭāwūs 1947, p. 635; Ibn Bābawayh 1976, p. 21; al-Ṭūsī 1993, p. 44; Ibn Bābawayh 1985, p. 53; Id. 1982 (*al-Khiṣāl*), vol. 20, p. 502; al-Fattāl 1966, vol. 2, p. 395; al-Ḥiskānī 1990, p. 498; al-Ṭūsī 1990, p. 797; al-Kafʿamī 1984, p. 478. See also al-Kisāʾī 1922-1923, p. 94. In fact, based on their tradition that this was the date of the Ark's departure, Shīʿites have come to attach special merit to fasting on the first of the month of Rajab. Fasting on that day is said to drive the fires of Hell away from the person fasting. In another version fasting seven days during that month drives away seven doors that open unto the fires of Hell. Eight days of fasting open eight doors to Paradise, whoever fasts fifteen days has his wishes granted. The more one fasts the more will one receive from God. For details see al-Mufīd 1992, p. 371. Cf. al-Nābulsī 1986, pp. 27-32; al-Ṭabarī 1960, vol. 1, p. 19; al-Diyārbakrī, no date, p. 72.

[23] See Honigmann, 1990, vol. 4, pp. 637-639; Kanazi 1992, pp. 187-194.

[24] See Veccia Vaglieri 1986, vol. 3, pp. 607-615.

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Then the angel Gabriel[25] revealed to Noah what would happen to Ḥusayn, that "he would be killed on this spot".[26] Noah was greatly saddened and cried. He became known as Noah[27] for having lamented the holy ground[28] where Ḥusayn was killed.[29]

[25] See Pedersen 1986, vol. 2, p. 345.

[26] In another tradition the angel said: "Here the grandson of Muḥammad, Seal of the prophets, and son of the Seal of the successors (*awsiyāʾ*) will be killed", whereupon Noah asked Gabriel who the killer is. Gabriel answered: "His killer is a man cursed by the inhabitants of seven heavens and seven earths". Noah then cursed him four times and then the Ark continued on its way until it landed on Mt. Jūdī. See al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 44, p. 243. According to this story Noah was not only aware of what would happen thousands of years hence, but also expressed his definite sympathies with the Shīʿite cause.

[27] In Arabic *Nūḥ* (derived by popular etymology from the Arabic root NWḤ, meaning to lament). Shīʿite sources disagree as to Noah's original name. According to some traditions at first his name was al-Sakan, which was changed later to Nūḥ because he lamented his people for one-thousand years less fifty (for more details see, for example, al-Majlisī, 1984, vol. 10, p. 78; Ibn Bābawayh 1966, vol. 2, p. 594; Id., 1958, vol. 1, p. 243; al-Jazāʾirī 1983, p. 68). According to another tradition his original name was ʿAbd al-Ghaffār (see al-Nabāṭī 1964, vol. 2, p. 44) and was changed to Nūḥ for the same reason as above. Still another tradition, quoting Abū ʿAbd Allāh [the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq], while agreeing that his original name was ʿAbd al-Ghaffār, gave Noah's lament for himself as the reason for the change in name (see al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 15, pp. 224, 255; al-Qummī 1983, vol. 1, p. 328; al-Jazāʾirī 1983, p. 68; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, pp. 281, 305). A further tradition gives his original name as ʿAbd al-Malik, and claims that the change in name is due to the fact that he cried for five-hundred years (see al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 15, p. 225; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, p. 286; Ibn Bābawayh 1966, vol. 1, p. 28; al-Jazāʾirī 1983, p. 68). Yet another tradition states that his name was at first ʿAbd al-Aʿlā, with the change in name also ascribed to five-hundred years of crying (see Ibn Bābawayh 1966, vol. 1, p. 28; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 11, p. 286). One tradition merely says that he was named Nūḥ because he lamented profusely (Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 3, p. 243). Al-Ṣadūq claims that the various original names ascribed to Noah do not contradict each other, for they all refer to his devotion to God, and so he was indeed the servant (*ʿAbd*) of the Forgiving (*al-Ghaffār*), the King (*al-Malik*) and the Supreme (*al-Aʿlā*) (see al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 15, p. 225). Clearly these various traditions reflect disagreements with respect to both the name itself and the reason why it was changed. However, what these Shīʿite sources have in common is a narrative that fits the Shīʿite creed and gives the reason for Noah's name as his lament for Ḥusayn, as if he were a member of his family, despite the fact that he lived thousands of years earlier. For Shīʿites this does not present a problem, since Noah as a prophet would know what to ordinary mortals was unknowable. For more on the name *Nūḥ* see Goldziher 1870, pp. 207-211.

[28] According to Shīʿite sources prophets and other righteous people visited Karbalāʾ and mourned there since the dawn of time. Among the prophets mentioned in this regard by Jaʿfar al-Tustarī, for example, we find the following: Adam when still in the Garden of Eden, Noah, Moses, al-Khaḍir, Solomon, Abraham, Jesus and Zacharias. All of these supposedly came to Karbalāʾ and sat in mourning for Ḥusayn. See al-Tustarī, no date, pp. 102-108.

[29] See, for example, al-ʿĀmilī 1984, pp. 10-11; Kanazi 1992, p. 187.

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5.2 *The Ark comes to rest on the Jūdī*

Shīᶜite traditions and Qurʾānic commentators state that Noah and his fellow-travelers stayed inside the Ark for seven days and nights, that it revolved around the house for a week, and in the end rested on the Jūdī,[30] which they interpret as referring to a location on the Euphrates at Kūfa.[31] But even if that *is* the case, it is not clear what logic there is to the claim that after only seven days the waters of the Flood had receded enough for the Ark to touch ground. According to another tradition the Ark floated for six months more, until on the day of ᶜĀshūrāʾ[32] Noah landed on Mt. Jūdī and fasted, together with all those who were with him.[33]

Still another account has the Ark touching ground on the twenty-third of the month of Ramaḍān.[34] Other dates given for the Ark's *apobaterion* are the twenty-fifth of the month of Dhū al-Qaᶜda (the day on which the earth uncoiled, and on which whoever fasts has his sins forgiven for seventy years),[35] and the eighteenth of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja.[36] According to Mītham b. Yaḥyā al-Tammār[37] the claim

[30] See Streck 1991, pp. 207-211.

[31] al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 8, p. 281; al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 3, p. 401; al-ᶜAyyāshī 1960, vol. 2, p. 146, no. 21; al-Ṭabarī 1961, vol. 1, p. 190; al-Thaᶜlabī, no date, pp. 50-51; al-Qaramānī 1992, p. 63. The last-mentioned source has the Ark landing on the tenth of the month of Muḥarram. Cf. Canova 2001, p. 7.

[32] On ᶜĀshūrāʾ see Marçais 1986, vol. 1, p. 705; Sindawi 2001, pp. 200-211; Ayoub 1978.

[33] Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 2, p. 384.

[34] al-Ṭūsī, 1990, p. 820.

[35] For more on the day of ᶜĀshūrāʾ see Kohlberg 1980, p. 57. Among the things that happened on that day are the following: God forgave Adam his sin (Ibn Manṣūr 1965, vol. 1, p. 284); Noah asked his people to repent (Ibn Ṭāwūs 1949, p. 239); Noah fasted and made it into a regular fast day (Ibn Manṣūr 1965, vol. 1, p. 338). Shīᶜites believe that no happy events can occur on that day (Ayoub 1978, pp. 150-151).

[36] Ibn Bābawayh 1966, vol. 1, p. 227. This date, the 18th of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja, is the anniversary of the famous Ghadīr Khumm incident, in which the Prophet, on his way back from the Farewell Pilgrimage in the year AH 10 stopped at the place of this name and when addressing his fellow pilgrims said: "He of whom I am the *mawlā*, of him ᶜAlī is also the *mawlā"* (*man kuntu mawlāh fa-ᶜAlī mawlāh*), an utterance which Shīᶜites interpret as meaning that the Prophet appointed ᶜAlī as leader of the Muslims after his death. See Veccia Vaglieri 1991, pp. 993-994.

[37] A client of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and before that a slave belonging to a woman of the Banū Asad. It is related that when ᶜAlī bought him he embraced and asked him for his name. The slave said: "Sālim". ᶜAlī answered: "The Messenger of God informed me that the name which your father gave you in Persia was Mītham". The slave then said: "God speaks the truth, and so does His Prophet, You are right, oh Commander of the Believers, it is indeed my name". He answered: "Then I shall give you back your name. We shall keep the name Sālim as your agnomen (*kunya*)", and he did indeed call him Abū Sālim. ᶜAlī revealed many things to him, including secrets pertaining to the Imāmate. Unfortunately Mītham talked to others about some of these things, and as a result the

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that the Ark landed on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ is false.[38] Still other traditions maintain that the Ark stopped on Mt. Jūdī on the day of *Nayrūz*.[39]

What all these Shīʿite traditions concerning the date on which the Ark touched ground have in common is that they commemorate important events in Shīʿite history or in the Shīʿite creed. Thus the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ is venerated by Shīʿites[40] as the day on which al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī was killed, and as a day of fasting from time immemorial. The twenty-third of Ramaḍān[41] falls during the last ten nights of the month, which are all associated with *laylat al-qadr*. The twenty-fifth of Dhū al-Qaʿda is the day on which the earth was unrolled from under the Kaʿba[42] or, according to another tradition, on which the Kaʿba came down from heaven.[43] The eighteenth of Dhū al-Ḥijja[44] is, as mentioned above, the anniversary of ʿAlī's appointment at Ghadīr Khumm.

Despite the different dates mentioned in the various traditions concerning the landing of the Ark it is thus clear that the story itself has been utilized for the purpose of demonstrating the existence of a link between the Shīʿite Imāms and

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people of Kūfa came to think of ʿAlī as a swindler and a fraud. See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 1967, vol. 2, pp. 291-292; al-Raḍḍī 1985, p. 54; al-Barqī 1963, pp. 4, 7; al-Kishshī 1929, pp. 79-81, nos. 134-136; p. 85, no. 140; al-Ṭūsī 1994, p. 98, nos. 3–951; p. 105, nos. 1–1034.

38 al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 45, p. 203; Ibn Bābawayh 1966, vol. 1, p. 228; cf. Heller 1995, vol. 8, pp. 111-112.

39 al-Jazāʾirī 1983, p. 82; al-Aḥsāʾī 1984, vol. 3, p. 42, no. 117; al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 8, pp. 173-174, no. 10340; al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 6, p. 352, nos. 1–6792. The meaning of the term, which also appears in the form *nawrūz*, is New Year. It is the first day of the Persian solar year, falling on the vernal equinox (March 21). However, according to Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī *nayrūz* is the first day of the Hijra year (see Levy 1993, p. 1047). As is its wont with respect to venerated dates, *nayrūz* is also claimed to possess numerous virtues and various important events are supposed to have occurred on it, as if to say that God willed that on this venerated day events of momentous import to Shīʿites should occur. Certainly the choice of *nayrūz* as a holy day is not coincidental, since many followers of Shīʿism are Persians, who probably transferred various traditions from their original Persian heritage into their new creed. Among these are traditions concerning the virtues of *nayrūz*, such as the following: It was the day when for the first time the sun rose, the wind blew, and blossoms appeared; on this day the Prophet carried the Commander of the Believers [ʿAlī] on his shoulders until he threw the idols of the tribe of Quraysh down from the roof of the Kaʿba and smashed them; on this day Abraham did the same; on this day, too, the Prophet took ʿAlī to the Valley of the Jinn and made them swear allegiance to them, the Commander of the Believers received the second pledge of allegiance, overcame the people of al-Nahrawān and killed Dhū al-Thudayya; and finally, it is the day on which the Hidden Imām will reappear. See al-Nūrī 1988; al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 8, pp. 158-170, no. 2–9254, quoted in al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 56, p. 92.

40 On the sanctity of the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ for Shīʿites see Sindawi 2001, pp. 200-214.

41 On the month of Ramaḍān see Plessner 1995, pp. 417-418.

42 al-Ḥillī 1987, p. 315.

43 al-Ṭūsī 1990, pp. 669, 820.

44 On the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja see De Blois 2000, pp. 257-302, and in particular p. 258.

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God's prophets. Both Imāms and prophets experience significant events at certain specific and well-known times, unlike ordinary mortals. But on the other hand, if we take at its face value the tradition that the Ark began its journey on the first day of the month of Rajab, and that a week later it landed on Mt. Jūdī, we must perforce conclude that the date of landing was the seventh of Rajab. And if we take the other tradition, that the Ark floated for six months, then it must have landed at the end of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja.[45] However, neither of these dates is mentioned in any Shīʿite source.

To conclude, Shīʿite writers would appear to have exploited the fact that so many different traditions existed concerning the date of the Ark's landing. The dates which they chose to propagate were of previous significance in the Shīʿite creed and their connection with Noah's Ark was meant to strengthen the links between Shīʿism and the ancient prophets, in order to demonstrate the antiquity and legitimacy of the former.

5.3 *Noah's Ark as a lifeboat ("Boat of Salvation")*

Shīʿite sources relate the following tradition in the name of Abū Dharr al-Ghaffārī[46] (Jundub b. Junāda, d. 652 CE) which quotes the Prophet as saying: "After me there will be twelve Imāms, nine of them descendents of Ḥusayn. The ninth will be resurrected. They will be for you like Noah's Ark: Whoever rode it was saved, and whoever missed it perished".[47]

According to this tradition the Prophet declared that twelve of his descendents will be the lifeboats of the community, each one of them in fact being a kind of Noah's Ark. The Imams of the Shīʿites are thus closely connected to the Ark. This interpretation is made explicit in al-Majlisī's commentary on the Qur'ānic verse "... related by progeny to each other",[48] where he says: "Noah's Ark brought about

[45] In fact, this date is attested in al-Kisāʾī 1922-1923, p. 97.

[46] His full name was Jundub b. Junāda b. Sufyān b. ʿUbayd from Banī Ghaffār (agnomen: Abū Dharr). He was one of the Prophet's early companions, renowned for his sincerity and truthfulness. After the Prophet's death he emigrated to the Syrian desert. For more details see Robson 1986, vol. 1, pp. 114-115; al-Ziriklī 1986, vol. 2, p. 140; al-Barqī 1963, pp. 1, 63; al-Ṭūsī 1994, p. 32, no. 11–143; p. 59, biography 1–496; al-Kishshī 1929, pp. 27-29, nos. 52-55; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 1967, vol. 8, p. 255; al-Ḥiskānī 1990, vol. 1, pp. 229-231, no. 235; al-Ṭūsī, no date, pp. 45-46, no. 148; Ibn Saʿd 1985, vol. 4, pp. 219-237; al-ʿAsqalānī 1992, vol. 7, pp. 125-130; al-Iṣfahānī 1997, vol. 1, pp. 210-225.

[47] Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 1, pp. 171, 295; vol. 3, p. 265; al-Thaʿālibī 1977, p. 39; al-Karājukī 1988, vol. 2, p. 67; al-Qummī 1986, p. 40; al-Khazzāz 1980, pp. 33, 38, 210; al-Ḥillī 1990, p. 322; al-Irbillī 1961, vol. 1, pp. 51, 408; al-Hilālī 1994, pp. 559, 732, 830, 937; Ibn Shādhān 1943, p. 159; al-Nuʿmānī 1976, p. 44; Shani 2002, p. 127.

[48] Qur. 3:34; Pickthall 2000, p. 59.

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salvation in this world, and the progeny of Muḥammad [i.e., the Imāms[49] descended from ᶜAlī and Fāṭima] will bring about salvation in the next world".

Even ᶜAlī himself is quoted on several occasions as saying quite explicitly of himselft "I am the gate of the House, the authority who settles disputes, the mound of the earth, the decider of fate, and the boat of salvation. Whosoever rides it will be saved, and whoever misses it will perish".[50]

Al-Kisāᵓī relates that God appeared to Noah and said to him: "Noah, your Ark will not remain sound unless you drive four nails into it on which you will have written the names of the four companions of Muḥammad, Abū Bakr (d. 634), ᶜUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), ᶜUthmān b. ᶜAffān (d. 656) and ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661)". Noah did so, and the Ark became sound. And then God made it speak, so that the people watched and heard the words "There is no God but Allāh and Noah is the prophet of Allāh. Whosoever rides me will be saved and whosoever misses me will perish. Only the sincere will enter me".[51] The Imāms are thus compared to Noah's Ark, for they, too, bring salvation to those who believe in them.[52]

The expression "lifeboat" (*safīnat al-najāt* – literally: Boat of Salvation) has become a venerated appellation (*laqab*)[53] of all the Shīᶜite Imāms, but especially of ᶜAlī,[54] to whom it was given by the Prophet himself as a mark of appreciation for

[49] According to the Shīᶜite creed the power of intercession on behalf of the believers resides in the Prophet and in his successors and descendants the Imāms, who possess "Divine grace" and whom God chose as the saviors of mankind on the Day of Judgment. The Imāms thus serve as "life boats", having themselves died as martyrs. The most prominent Imām in this respect is the third, al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī, who suffered greatly, he and his family and companions, and died a martyr's death. Ḥusayn's struggle, his personality, principles, heroism and sacrifice, are all linked to pain, the pain to hope, and the hope to eventual salvation from the same Divine Will that imposed this pain and martyrdom. For humankind cannot by itself overcome human pain. Martyrdom thus became the way to grace and salvation and al-Ḥusayn himself became a "life boat", since he gave his own life for the salvation of the Muslims. See al-Ḥaydarī 1999, p. 308.

[50] Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 2, p. 118; vol. 3, p. 90; al-Ṭūsī 1993, p. 60, no. 88-57; p. 349, no. 61-721; p. 459, no. 32-1026; p. 482, no. 22-1053; p. 531, no. 29-1122; p. 634, no. 6-1304; p. 733, no. 2-1532; al-Mufīd 1922 (2), p. 145, no. 5; al-Ṭabarī 1963, pp. 32, 88; al-Ṣaffār 1983, p. 297, no. 4; al-Ḥarrānī 1983, p. 113; Ibn Ṭāwūs 1992, pp. 620-621, no. 18; cf. al-Shaᶜīrī 1984, pp. 14, 182; al-Kūfī 1989, p. 190, no. 243-190; al-Ḥalabī 1983, p. 125.

[51] al-Kisāᵓī 1922-1923, p. 93.

[52] al-Kafᶜamī 1984, p. 737.

[53] On the significance of appellations see, for ex., Poynton 1989, p. 41; see also Bāshā 1975.

[54] On the appellation "Boat of Salvation" as applied to ᶜAlī see al-Rāwandī 1988, p. 173, no. 202; as applied to Ḥusayn see, for example, al-Ṭabarsī 1970, p. 400: "It is written on the right of God's Throne that Ḥusayn is a guiding lamp and a lifeboat...". For further information on ᶜAlī's appellations and agnomina see Ibn Shādhān 1943, p. 175, who says that " ᶜAlī has in all more than three-hundred names, appellations and agnomina", among them seventeen agnomina, including Abū al-Ḥasan, Abū al-Ḥusayn, Abū

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his past actions and of encouragement in view of the leadership role he would play in future in this world, and the grace he would grant his followers in the afterworld. The image of a lifeboat has been used as an appellation by Shīᶜite poets. For example, Jaᶜfar b. Makkī al-Ḥājib,[55] a poet of the seventh century AH, says the following in two lines of a thirteen-line *qaṣīda*:[56]

> And as Noah built a boat that rescued him from an overwhelming current
> So is my sublime Lord ᶜAlī a boat in which his supporters will be saved

The poet here clearly compares Noah, who built an Ark in order to save himself and his supporters from drowning, to ᶜAlī, who is himself considered to be like the Ark for his own followers. In the Shīᶜite view Noah saved his people in this world, but ᶜAlī is a savior of his followers in the world to come, which is more important than this world.

Another poet who mentioned Noah's Ark as an image of a lifeboat for salvation was Abū ᶜUthmān al-Khālidī (d. ?):[57]

> Oh scornful one, I drape myself with devotion as a mark of my love for the people of the cover,
> Noah's Ark, whoever adheres to their rope will stay on the high ground

Here the poet addresses his detractors, telling them that he is devoted to the Prophet's family, whom the Prophet had covered with his cloak,[58] and that they, the

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Shabbar, Abū Turāb and Abū al-Nūrayn, as well as sixteen names and thirty-three appellations. For more on the appellations of Imāms in general, see al-Nuᶜmānī 1976, pp. 29, 44. Among the many names, appellations and agnomina given to ᶜAlī are the following: Ḥaydar, Abū al-Ḥasan, al-Imām, Abū Turāb, and Amīr al-Muᵓminīn (Commander of the believers). Some of his agnomina have been analyzed by modern scholars. See, for example, Kohlberg 1978, pp. 347-352 on the agnomen Abū Turāb. The title of Commander of the believers is the second most common appellation used for the Caliphs, after that of Caliph itself. The first Caliph to have had that appellation was ᶜUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. See al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 5, p. 445. Since then this appellation, referring to the Caliph's military role, became a title of all Caliphs. See Sharon 1982, p. 125.

55 See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 1967, vol. 7, p. 137; vol. 9, p. 24; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 31, p. 83.

56 These lines are quoted from Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 3, p. 90.

57 The poem appears in Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 1258 CE) 1967, among poems disparaging this world. See Id., vol. 3, p. 346.

58 Here there is an allusion to a Qurᵓānic verse known as the "Verse of Purification": "For God wants to remove your impurity, family of the Prophet, to purify you completely" (Qur. 33:33). All Shīᶜite commentators agree that this verse refers to ᶜAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and that what the Prophet did on that occasion was to spread his cloak over the four, who were joined also by the angel Gabriel, and said: "By God, these are my family. Take away their impurity and purify them completely", upon which the verse was revealed. See al-Qazwīnī 1993, pp. 90-93; al-Kūfī 1989, pp. 333-340, 420; al-Qummī 1982, vol. 1, p. 5; vol. 2, pp. 67,155, 193, 346.

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Imāms, are a lifeboat for their followers, granting them salvation in this world and in the world to come.

5.4 *Noah pleads with the Prophet and his family for help*

Another connection which the Shīᶜa found between Noah and the Prophet's family concerns Noah's entreaties to God, the Prophet and his family when he feared that he would drown. According to Shīᶜite tradition this was his prayer: "Oh, God, I will pray to you in the name of Muḥammad, ᶜAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn if you save me from drowning". When he finished uttering the prayer he was saved from drowning. One tradition explains that God destroyed mankind in the Flood because they were hostile to ᶜAlī and would not accept him as their sovereign.[59]

5.5 *Noah's ass and Muḥammad's ass*

Shīᶜite writers found the following link between the asses of Noah and Muḥammad, in a tradition quoting Abū ᶜAbd Allāh [the Imām Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq] as saying: "With Noah in the Ark there was an ass.[60] Noah came up to it and stroked its rump, whereupon the ass spoke to Noah, saying: "From the loins of this ass shall come an ass on which the lord and seal of all prophets [Muḥammad] will ride. Praise be to God for having made me that ass".[61]

In this tradition Noah's ass speaks of its own accord,[62] telling Noah about the future birth of ᶜUfayr,[63] the Prophet's ass, and thanking God for having chosen it as the forefather.

[59] Ibn Bābawayh 1958, vol. 2, p. 54; al-Jazāᵓirī 1983, p. 67; al-ᶜĀmilī 1988, vol. 7, p. 100; Ibn Bābawayh 1982 (*al-Khiṣāl*), vol. 1, p. 335; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 16, p. 366; al-Shaᶜīrī 1984, p. 8; al-Astarabādī 1988, p. 53. Tradition has it that Abraham, too, mentioned the Prophet's family when imploring God. When he was thrown into the fire he is said to have prayed as follows: "Oh, God, I will pray in the name of Muḥammad and his family if you save me from [the fire]". Whereupon God caused the fire to cool. See Ibn Bābawayh 1983, pp. 218, 456; al-Fattāl 1966, vol. 2, p. 272. From these examples we see that in the Shīᶜite view not only God, but the Prophet and his family as well, are a means of salvation.

[60] See Canova 2001, p. 12.

[61] al-Kulaynī 1946, vol. 1, p. 237.

[62] A number of traditions report asses speaking to their masters. These were collected by Ṭughrul Bey in his book, *al-Nuṭq al-mafhūm min ahl al-ṣamt al-maᶜlūm.* For more detail, see Ṭughrul Bey 1864, pp. 82-86.

[63] On ᶜUfayr see Sindawi, forthcoming in the journal *al-Masaq*; al-ᶜĀmilī 1988, vol. 11, p. 489; al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 8, p. 265; al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 16, p. 126; vol. 61, p. 195; Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 1, pp. 97, 168. As for the meaning of the name, one opinion has it that it is the diminutive form of *aᶜfar*, meaning dust-colored. In a tradition transmitted by Saᶜd b. ᶜUbāda it is claimed that the ass's name was Yaᶜfūr, with the same meaning as above. However, there is also a tradition which maintains that the latter name means a

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Noah, like the prophet Solomon, has the ability to understand the speech of animals. Here he understands the utterance of his ass, who tells him that one of his descendants will be Muḥammad's ass. By this the Shīᶜites intend to create a link between Noah and the Prophet Muḥammad despite the great temporal distance between them. The Prophet's ass is thus seen as only the last link in a long chain of prophets' asses spanning the centuries from Adam, the first prophet, to Muḥammad, Seal of the Prophets. In fact, Noah's ass here foretells the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad.

5.6 *The tombs of Noah and ᶜAlī*

An additional fertile source of comparison between Noah and ᶜAlī is their supposed common grave. According to Shīᶜite sources Noah is buried in Najaf in the same tomb where the mortal remains of Adam,[64] Idrīs[65] and, later, ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, were laid to rest. It is reported that Abū Jaᶜfar [the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir[66] (d.732)] said: "When the Ark was moving around the Kaᶜba during the Flood it stopped next to the south corner. The angel Gabriel then came down over Noah and said 'God commands you to go down and stand between the Ark and the south corner. When your feet will be steady on the ground search there with your hand and you will find the coffin of your forefather Adam. Lift it out and take it with you on the Ark. When the water will have receded, bury it in Najaf, in white embers (*al-dhakawāt al-bīḍ*) from the soil of Kūfa. That is a burial plot for him, for you, and for ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the legatee of Muḥammad'.[67] Noah did as he was commanded, and ordered his son to bury him in the same plot, next to Adam's coffin". Then Abū Jaᶜfar added, addressing his followers: "When you visit the shrine of the Commander of the Believers, visit it as the shrine of Adam, Noah and the Commander of the Believers".[68]

According to this tradition a chain of prophets and Imāms, from Adam to ᶜAlī, were all buried in the same tomb, although Adam's body had to be transferred to Najaf[69] from Mecca. What the common burial site signifies is that in the Shīᶜite

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gazelle, and was given to the ass because it ran like one; still another tradition explains it as meaning a baby gazelle. See al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 16, p. 97. According to tradition ᶜUfayr died when the Prophet held him by the noseband, whereupon he ran until he reached a well belonging to Banī Ḥuṭama in Qubāᶜ and threw itself into it. The well thus became its grave. See al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 17, p. 404. Another tradition relates that it threw itself into a well belonging to Abū al-Haytham al-Tayhān. See al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 20, p. 382.

64 Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 3, pp. 242, 265. For more on Adam see Pedersen 1986, vol. 1, pp. 176-178; Kister 1993, pp. 113-174.

65 On Idrīs see Vajda 1986, pp. 1030-1.

66 See Kohlberg 1993, vol. 7, pp. 397-400.

67 al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 10, p. 219; Rubin 1979, p. 53; Kohlberg 1980, p. 58.

68 al-Nūrī 1988, vol. 10, p. 219; al-Karājukī 1989, vol. 2, p. 121; al-Shāᶜīrī 1984, p. 21.

69 For more on Najaf see Honigmann 1993, pp. 859-861.

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view all these prophets and the Imām ʿAlī enjoy equal status, and that this had been decided by God at the very beginning of time.

Shīʿite sources further tell us that Noah dug his own grave, and that of ʿAlī next to it, and that he left a written testament in Syriac on teakwood, saying: "In the name of God, the kind the merciful. Noah dug this tomb for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib the legatee of Muḥammad seven-hundred years before the Flood".[70] As Noah was digging the tomb uttered the following line of poetry:

> Greetings to a grave containing Ḥaydar[71] and Noah, nor is Adam missing from it.

As this tradition makes abundantly clear, it is the Shīʿite belief that Noah knew of ʿAlī, and prepared a common tomb for both on God's command. ʿAlī, too, was aware of this connection, since he ordered his sons to bury him in the grave which Noah had prepared for him, and whose location he showed them. It is further related that when ʿAlī's sons came to bury him in that tomb they found Noah's inscription with the above-mentioned text.[72]

Here, again, we see how Shīʿite tradition links Noah and ʿAlī, in disregard of the great temporal distance between them. Indeed, it is the Shīʿite view that both Noah and ʿAlī, prophet and legatee, belong to the class of Men of God, and that the two types, prophet and legatee, have many traits in common.

5.7 *Both Noah and ʿAlī are bearers of the Throne*

In order to strengthen even more the ties between Noah and ʿAlī Abū Jaʿfar [the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir] gave his own interpretation to the following Qurʾānic verse (Qur. 40:7):

[70] Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 2, p. 249; vol. 3, pp. 242, 265; al-Fattāl 1966, vol. 1, p. 136; al-Rāwandī 1988, vol. 1, p. 136; Rubin 1979, p. 53.

[71] The word *ḥaydar*, meaning 'lion', is one of the appellations of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. He was named thus by his mother Fāṭima, daughter of Asad b. Hāshim, in honor of her father (the word *asad* also means lion), since ʿAlī's father Abū Ṭālib was away when he was born. When he returned he changed his son's name to ʿAlī. ʿAlī composed the following poem on the incident: "I am whom my mother named Ḥaydar / Like a most forceful lion" (*layth* - another word meaning lion). Fore more detail see al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 20, p. 10; vol. 21, p. 9; vol. 27, p. 17; vol. 33, p. 283; vol. 35, p. 45; vol. 65, p. 60; vol. 35, pp. 39-62; vol. 67, p. 41; vol. 14, p. 60; vol. 86, p. 99; al-Mufīd 1992 (3), vol. 1, p. 127; al-Ṭūsī 1993, p. 4; al-Ṭabarī 1963, p. 12; al-Ṣaffār 1983, p. 98; al-Rāwandī 1988, vol. 1, p. 216; vol. 2, p. 856; Ibn Abī Ṭālib 1990, p. 216; al-Fattāl 1966, vol. 1, p. 130; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 1967, vol. 1, pp. 11-12; vol. 19, p. 127; al-Nabāṭī 1964, vol. 2, p. 35; Ibn al-Biṭrīq 1986, pp. 148, 151-152, 154, 157; Ibn Shādhān 1943, p. 175; al-Irbillī 1961, vol. 1, pp. 65, 214; Ibn Bābawayh 1982 (*Maʿānī al-akhbār*), pp. 58-60; Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 3, pp. 3, 106 ff., 276; vol. 4, pp. 21, 53; al-Minqarī 1982, p. 390; Ibn Manẓūr 1990, vol. 4, p. 174, entry ḤDR.

[72] Ibn Shahrāshūb 1959, vol. 2, p. 349.

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> Those who bear the Throne,[73] and all who are round about it, hymn the praises of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe, (saying): Our Lord! Thou comprehendest all things in mercy and knowledge, therefore forgive those who repent and follow Thy way. Ward off from them the punishment of hell.

The Imām explained as follows: The bearers of the Throne are eight in number, four of the ancients and four of the younger. The four ancients are Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The four younger are Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. According to Shīʿite belief the the expression "those who bear the Throne" refers to the Imāms, who are the bearers of true knowledge.[74]

6. *Conclusion*

The story of Noah and the Ark has been utilized in Shīʿite tradition at a number of levels for the purpose of demonstrating its own antiquity, reaching back, so it claims, thousands of years to the times of Noah. Furthermore, the Ark was constructed on the site of the mosque of Kūfa, the most hallowed spot on earth for Shīʿites. This is where the Ark began its journey and this is also where it touched the ground again at the end of its journey. The meaning of this claim for Shīʿites is that the sanctity of Kūfa is very ancient indeed, in fact so ancient that Noah himself was already aware of it.

The claim of Shīʿite antiquity is further enhanced in tradition by the incident concerning the passage of the Ark in Karbalāʾ, where it almost drowned, and where Noah is supposed to have lamented the death of Ḥusayn who was killed there. In addition, the Ark came to rest in Kūfa once more, providing yet another link for Shīʿites between the ancient tale of Noah and the sacred ground of Kūfa. Here is proof, according to Shīʿite belief, that this ground has been consecrated to prophets and Imāms since the earliest times. Furthermore, the tale as a whole can be seen as symbolizing the faith of Shīʿism: Just as Noah saved those of his followers who complied with his instructions, so the Shīʿite believers will be able to escape the torments awaiting sinners in the afterlife if they obey the instructions of their Imāms. It is thus not surprising that all twelve Shīʿite Imāms have become known as "life boats" (*safīnat al-najāt*), an appellation reminiscent of Noah's Ark (*safīnat Nūḥ*). Finally, the link between Noah and ʿAlī was strengthened even more by having both of them buried on the same location and by identifying both as bearers of the Throne.

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[73] For more on the Throne see Berque 1986, p. 661; on the seat of the Throne see Hurat, 1986, p. 509.

[74] al-Majlisī 1984, vol. 55, p. 19, no. 55; vol. 27, pp. 55; 97; vol. 35, pp. 99, 123; vol. 41, p. 99; al-Astarābādī p. 691; al-Qummī 1983, vol. 2, p. 383; Ibn Bābawayh 1983, p. 120.

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SUMMARY

In this paper we analyze the place which Noah and his Ark occupy in Twelver Shīᶜa thought. The story of Noah's Ark was mobilized by Shīᶜite writers to demonstrate the antiquity of their creed which, so they claimed, went back many millennia, all the way to Noah. In this view Noah was in reality a Shīᶜite himself, as corroborated by traditions according to which Noah was aware of the sanctity of Kūfa, at the site of whose mosque he built and launched his Ark. When the Ark passed by Karbalāᵓ Noah is reported to have cursed the man who killed al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī. Furthermore, in Shīᶜite opinion both Noah and ᶜAlī were buried in the same grave and both are among the Bearers of the Throne. We also discuss the connection between Noah and the Shīᶜite Imāms, and the reason why the latter are known as "lifeboats".

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